



**Office of the Attorney General  
Paul G. Summers**

**Department of Commerce and Insurance  
Commissioner Paula Flowers**

**CONSUMER ALERT**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Aug. 26, 2003  
#03-17

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**ATTORNEY GENERAL WARNS CONSUMERS TO BEWARE OF INDIVIDUALS OR  
DOCUMENT PREPARATION SERVICES OFFERING UNAUTHORIZED SERVICES**

If someone offers you legal services at a discount rate, it's a good idea to make sure they are licensed to practice law in this state, Tennessee Attorney General Paul G. Summers is warning consumers. The alert comes following complaints of unauthorized practice of law cases, some of which involve exploiting non-English speaking consumers who do not understand the legal requirements in this country.

"We all find ourselves needing legal services at some point in our lives," said Tennessee Attorney General Paul G. Summers, "and we want to make sure Tennesseans have all the facts before they pay for legal services that may not be legitimate."

Summers urges residents to be wary of nonlawyers and "document preparation" services that advertise to prepare legal documents or provide legal advice without the supervision of a licensed attorney. Such illegal advice is often advertised on the Internet or in newspapers, offering low-cost legal documents, including divorces, adoptions, or bankruptcies without needing an attorney.

"Many of these vital legal services can severely affect your livelihood and happiness if prepared

incorrectly by someone who is not trained or licensed to practice law,” Summers said. “Unfortunately, the ones who most need to save money are the ones unlicensed practitioners target such as the elderly and more vulnerable members of our society.”

Mary Clement, director of the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs, said, “Seniors are especially vulnerable to these types of scams because they tend to be more trustworthy. Scam artists often target those with fixed-incomes or lack of family to advise them. We want to educate consumers to be their own best advocate.”

In the end, especially if mistakes are made, it could cost the consumer more than if they had hired an attorney. The Attorney General’s Office and Division of Consumer Affairs offer the following tips for those seeking legal services:

\*Watch out for advertisements that say legal documents can be prepared without attorneys. In Tennessee, only licensed attorneys can prepare and review legal documents and give advice.

\*Generally, in Tennessee, "practicing law" includes advising clients as to any law for money, appearing to represent a client in a legal capacity, and writing legal documents or pleadings.

\*Even if an advertisement for document preparation doesn’t mention attorneys, consumers should always ask if there is an attorney that prepares and reviews the documents.

\*Make sure that you consult with a lawyer that is licensed to practice in Tennessee. Check and verify that the person is active to practice by calling the Tennessee Board of Professional Responsibility at (615) 361-7500 or 1-800-486-5714.

\*If you are looking to hire an attorney, get recommendations from friends, coworkers or family members. Another alternative is a Lawyer Referral Service. State and local bar associations offer this service and you can schedule a consultation with a lawyer in your area. Referral services are available in East Tennessee: (865) 522-7501, Middle and West Tennessee: (615) 242-6546 and Southeast Tennessee: (423) 756-3222.

\*Free legal help for low-income people may be available. Legal Aid does not handle criminal cases, but does help with many civil law cases such as problems with landlords, food stamps, Families First (welfare), TennCare, Medicare; health care or family problems, especially domestic violence. If you have a legal problem but cannot afford to pay for a lawyer, you can contact one of the following Legal Aid Offices to find a regional office nearest your home.

Legal Aid may be reached by calling Memphis Area Legal Services, (731) 523-8822; Southeast Tennessee Legal Services (Chattanooga) (423) 756-0128 or (800) 836-0128; West Tennessee Legal Services (Jackson) (731) 423-0616 or (800) 372-8346; Legal Aid of East Tennessee (Knoxville) (423) 637-0484; Legal Aid of Middle Tennessee (Nashville) (615) 244-6610; Legal Assistance for the Elderly (Knoxville) - Serving persons age 60 and older (865) 691-2551 ext. 223 or (800) 362-9276 or Aging Services for Upper Cumberland (Cookeville)-Serving persons age 60 and older (931)

432-4210.

Anyone who is aware of individuals or companies that may be engaging in the unauthorized practice of law should contact the Tennessee Attorney General's Office to file a complaint by calling (615) 741-1671 or 1-877-275-7396..